

Building and Development Permit: Streamlining Practices and Development Approvals

ISSUE

The reports provides information on the Building and Development Permit Operational Review, the status of continuous improvement initiatives and the continuous improvement project underway to support streamlined and leading business practices and development approval processes.

BACKGROUND

The Building and Development sector is highly regulated/legislated and includes application, permit and inspection processes that facilitate both land use and construction in Saskatoon. Issuing a permit, whether for a residential or commercial construction project, requires a comprehensive review of the application to ensure regulatory requirements are met prior to the start of construction.

Efficiency and effectiveness of the permit process is key to delivering exceptional service and value to customers. To align with strategic priorities and respond to industry needs, the following continuous improvement initiatives have been undertaken to identify ways to streamline the permitting process:

1. Private Development Civic Service Review;
2. Building and Development Permit Operational Review;
3. Infill Roundtable led by the Saskatoon and Region Home Builders' Association;
4. Saskatoon Construction Association Roundtable Commercial Permit Review;
5. Developer Liaison Committee led by Administration;
6. Planning and Development Fee Review; and
7. An online initiative aimed at streamlining processes and moving development and building permit application processes online.

At the September 4, 2018, Standing Policy Committee on Planning, Development, and Community Services (Committee) meeting, the Administration presented an information report highlighting the Building and Plumbing Permit Program fee changes and the continuous improvement initiatives underway at that time to support streamlining practices for permitting and development approvals.

The Building Standards fee review led to the undertaking of the Building and Development Permit Operational Review and the Planning and Development Fee Review. These reviews were completed to respond to stakeholder requests for a more streamlined permitting process and reduced timelines for permit approvals.

From that meeting, Committee resolved that the Administration include recommendations for how the City of Saskatoon (City) could be a national leader in building and development permit turnaround time, as part of the Building and Development Permit Operational Review process.

CURRENT STATUS

To balance the needs of citizens, the interest of businesses and the legislated requirements that the City must abide by, Administration has made strides to create efficiencies in advance of the formal project start. Work completed to date includes:

1. Reorganization within existing staffing levels to work towards better addressing building and development permit program needs;
2. Sourcing software solutions to support online submission of commercial building permits;
3. Streamlining the site development review process for phased permits to significantly reduce the number of times permit applications are reviewed by Saskatoon Water and Construction and Design Divisions;
4. Development of a new intake process for commercial building permits has been underway and is set to be implemented in October 2019. Similar to the successful process used with residential building permits, only complete applications will circulate for review, which reduces delays created by time spent on incomplete applications; and
5. Hiring of a Business Relationship Manager, Project Managers and a Business Analyst has been completed and forms the core project team to lead implementation of the continuous improvement project, and online initiatives.

DISCUSSION/ANALYSIS

The Building and Development Operational Review Report (see Appendix 1) has a number of recommendations to streamline the permitting process, and ways to become a national leader in building and development permit turnaround times. The recommendations are summarized into six categories: Performance Standards; Customer Service; Processes and Policies; Technologies; Organization Structure and Staffing; and Implementation and Change Management. As identified above, a number of recommendations have already been implemented.

Planning and Development Fee Review (see Appendix 2) was undertaken to review and make recommendations with respect to development fees and planning operations. Proposed fee changes are based on full cost recovery principles and take into account staffing level shifts needed to support streamlined development approvals. In particular, last year, existing staffing levels were reorganized to assign a fourth Development Review Officer which has provided value in managing timelines for permit approvals. Industry consultation has begun and proposed Development Review fee changes will be presented to Committee and Council later this year.

In discussion with industry partners earlier this year, it was determined a plan was needed to harmonize various initiatives into one project with measured outcomes, which led to the development of the continuous improvement project.

The Administration is working to coordinate the Building and Development Operational Review Report with the Private Development Civic Service Review, industry roundtables and the initiative for online service, to identify areas of overlap, prioritize the deliverables and pool administrative resources. The goal of this continuous improvement project is to work with the development industry in prioritizing the areas of focus as we formalize the implementation plan, which will see changes, designed to streamline business practices and development approvals, phased in over a number of years. Administration is committed to continuing our work with the development industry to become a leading practice municipality in the provision of building and development permits, applications and inspection processes.

Communication throughout the project is a priority. Building Standards has started issuing a monthly newsletter to industry and permit customers. The newsletter is a tool for the Administration to seek regular feedback and for readers to get involved in the project.

NEXT STEPS

The hiring of a Building Standards Special Project Manager on July 2, 2019, marked the formal start date of the project. Work in July and August will focus on engaging with stakeholders and developing a continuous improvement project implementation plan, complete with metrics, for tracking performance.

Project success will be determined by metrics assigned to each permitting category to track effectiveness of each action against what we are striving for, which is ultimately streamlined and expedient business practices and development approvals. The key metrics that the Administration will monitor include, but are not limited to:

1. Number and volume of building permits;
2. Timelines for permit approvals;
3. Customer satisfaction surveys related to permit application; and
4. Percentage comparison of online applications to paper applications

APPENDICES

1. Operational Review – Building and Development 2019 Summary
2. Planning and Development Fee Review

Report Approval

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